

Tea for Two at Cinnamara
By Tunis Romein II
Provided by Libby (Romein) Bartley, Tunie's Daughter

TEA FOR TWO AT CINNAMARA

Tea plantations, cassia groves, allamanda and hybiscus blooms glistening in summertime monsoon showers, a patch of jungle here and there---this is a corner of the valley of Assam in a little village named Cinnamara.

Wild and beautiful Naga Hills, home of the headhunters, range to the south, complemented by the indescribably massive Himalayas to the north.

Now during World War II this tiny locality in far away India became the setting of a weird mixture of East and West---Hindu Brahmins and U. S. army corporals, Moslem washermen and military brass, sacred cows and GI jeeps. It is this setting which provided the backdrop for a not-easy-to-believe gentle tale with a happy ending.

My story begins, however, in a quite different sort of place a few miles from ~~the~~ Mediterranean shores in the Palestinian community of Tel Litwinsky. An American army outpost was located in this area named Levant Post. Its purpose supposedly was to provide rest and recreation for soldiers fighting on the North African front, but mostly it turned out to be a pleasantly self-sufficient resort area with a hospital, special services unit, transportation outfit, chapel, finance unit, and so on, all leisurely looking after the needs of each other. The Post's distinguishing features were a first rate outdoor swimming pool surrounded by desert, and a little block of carefully tended flowers also in the middle of desert sands and dubbed "Times Square" by the GIs.

The Army Chapel was located just off "Times Square" and it was here on a Sunday morning that I met Lt. Sarah C. Harris, Army Nurse Corps, after she had sung a solo in the chapel service. She looked unusually attractive in her Sunday-go-to-meeting white uniform.

In the months following, Lt. Harris often sang for divine services, and I often played for them, and also accompanied her when she sang ~~solos~~ on these occasions.

After spending almost a year in this unique assignment of fighting the war by looking after the swimming pool and helping the chaplain with Sabbath services, word came that my Special Services outfit was slated soon to move to Cairo. For one who had grown up on lush north Illinois farmland, this was a sad prospect, for I had already spent some time in Egypt ---that dark land which withered the spirit with its dry stifling atmosphere not to mention withering the body with torrid breezes and unmerciful desert sun.

II. A CORPORAL VERSUS THE SYSTEM

Probably only once in ten thousand times is it possible for a T/5 corporal to exert any influence at all in deciding where he should like to go to fight the war. Yet sometimes a little freedom can go a long way. I did have the freedom to tell the chaplain about my desire to go any direction except toward Cairo.

Now the chaplain was attached to the 24th Station Hospital at Levant Post, and he got word that his outfit was soon to be heading for India. He also wanted me to continue helping with the work at the Chapel. To make a long story short, it so happened that the chaplain knew a general, and persuaded him to send along orders for me to be transferred from my Special Services outfit to the 24th Station Hospital outfit. Miracle of miracles, the order came through with only a few hours to spare and by the next day we were off to India.

Sarah C. Harris, ANC, being one of the nurses in the outfit, was heading for India too. It looked like the chaplain had it made: a nurse to help with the singing, and a corporal to help with the playing.

III. GOODBYE BEAUTIFUL "TIMES SQUARE" AND DESERT SWIMMING POOL

We boarded an ancient looking Polish ship at Port Said, and soon we were laboriously pushing our way through the quiet waters of the Arabian Sea.

We finally arrived at Bombay Harbor, the gateway to India, and there before us was the city of the Hanging Gardens, a city breathtakingly beautiful in part, but also a place of frightful contrast between wealth and poverty.

With surprising efficiency the army loaded us aboard third-class railroad cars, and for eleven days we enjoyed a slow moving panoramic view of the Indian hinterlands. The train stopped so often that we finally took to fishing ponds and streams when we tired of seeing the sights.

The countryside was a continuing succession of scenes from desert to jungles, to mountains, to lowlands with rice fields and squalid villages. We crossed the Ganges on a fairly large barge at night by pale misty moonlight. How unbelievable---this exotic scene on the Ganges. I remember being asked to get out the accordion and to play some of the homeland sentimental favorites of the time. There was a wistful sadness in the realization that "In the Evening By the Moonlight" American version was so far, far away from our new kind of evening by the moonlight in a Ganges setting.

A few days later we ferried across the Brahmaputra River (originating in Tibet). By now, on this last lap of our journey, we were skirting the awesome Himalayan ranges on the left, and on the right a fabulous land of tigers, wild elephants, rhinoceros, snakes, and Japs (who were dug in some thirty miles away), and most fascinating of all, the Naga headhunters.

IV. JUNGLES, RICE PADDIES, AND TEA PLANTATIONS

Shortly after St. Valentine's Day, 1944, we arrived at our destination in the middle of jungles, rice paddies, and tea plantations. Within a week the hospital was set up and ready for action. Everybody was busy, and everything was new and different.

For six months I saw little of the singing Lieutenant. When I played the accordion on the wards she sometimes joined us in helping with the singing. On a few occasions she went along to help with entertainment for the railroad battalion some miles away. For a year and a half now we were casually saying hello, occasionally rehearsing musical selections. And once in a while she stopped by our office. Once I walked with her as far as the gate since I was going that way anyway, and I do remember her making a casual reference to a close acquaintance---some lieutenant in the Air Force.

Then came the day when the head nurse asked me to furnish some music for a nurses' party. That night I was disillusioned somewhat with the sight of nurses and their officer friends imbibing immoderately to say the least. Lt. Harris was at the party too, but by contrast she seemed to be in her right mind. She was also her usual friendly self and helped me feel at ease.

V. AN UNSEEN ENEMY WORSE THAN THE JAPS

The hospital was struggling to adjust itself to a strange world while at the same time worrying about Japs cutting off our supply lines. But the enemy giving us the most trouble was a tiny protozoan called an ameba which had slipped past our defences, wreaking havoc on the tummies and intestinal linings of our brave hospital corps.

I had my turn to report to the Dysentary Ward, and who should be the head nurse but the Lieutenant. During my convalescent stage she honored me by letting me carry a set of long vicious looking needles while she efficiently jabbed into long lines of exposed anatomies injecting them with emetine, a medicine purported to cure their intestinal ailments.

As a result of handling so much emetine, the Lieutenant got an allergic reaction and was assigned to the officers' ward for treatment and rest. I visited every ward every day, and so almost every day I had the opportunity to stop a moment and chat with her, and others of course. Sometimes it amounted to more than a chat, especially at times when our brother the chaplain was giving me a rough time. Sometimes, I discovered, it was harder to get along with the brethren than with ordinary folks. But having talked with the Lieutenant, I would go away feeling better.

Another problem was now cropping up. I had been corresponding quite regularly with a young lady back in the States. But now things were going up and down. We would get into arguments by mail which made matters complicated with some 12,000 miles between us.

Things went from bad to worse after a number of upheavals, and all in all it was a worrisome business.

VI. FROM DAY TO DAY THE PICTURE CHANGES IN THE ARMY

About this time orders came through for the nurses in our outfit to return to the States. I congratulated Lt. Harris on her good fortune and said I would miss her. She nonchalantly replied that she would refer me to her replacement---a fitting response from officer to a corporal I suppose.

But what actually happened was that replacements came through for all nurses ---all nurses except Lt. Harris, that is. Within a few weeks all the nurses left, but Lt. Harris stayed.

Now I wasn't the only one who had troubles. Come December and we see a forlorn nurse, far away from home, her friends gone, and her orders lost in higher headquarters.

December was a time for many programs and activities, especially Christmas and New Year programs with many calls for help with the music. We lingered longer than usual after our rehearsals while she talked about her discouragements and I talked about my discouragements.

Shortly before Christmas the Red Cross had a party for the patients at our hospital. Lt. Harris was asked to sing and I was asked to play. After the party I suggested that I could escort her home. After all it was not inappropriate for an enlisted man to accompany a nurse to her quarters with the dangers of tigers, leopards and other creatures in the dark.

We usually rehearsed for our programs in the little chapel, the doors of which were always open. The chapel setting was a picturesque place, quiet and restful, surrounded by flowering hibiscus shrubs, blossom-covered cassia trees, yellow belled allamanda, and nearby luxurious gardenias. Our rehearsals were getting to be more than casual now, it seemed, but no one in our outfit noticed, for after all entertainment was part of our daily work.

We really did not know what to expect since the Lieutenant's orders would be coming through any day. At the same time our enlarging friendship might become discernable to those around us. The colonel of the outfit was very finicky about his nurses. If he got the least inkling of some kind of increased fraternization between a nurse and an enlisted man, that would certainly be the end, with one or another being sent to Timbucktu or Shangri-La, or some other far-away place.

VII. ARMY LIFE NO LONGER ROUTINE

The time came when routine rehearsals no longer proved a facade for meeting times. There were lots of evenings going to waste so we began arranging evening rendezvous, making plans one day at a time depending upon continually changing circumstances.

These maneuvers required careful strategies, for after dark I simply must not be seen stopping by at the nurses' headquarters. So we decided to meet at the front gate of the teagarden clubhouse which was a few hundred yards from the nurses' quarters. If at the time we were meeting, some enlisted personnel came by, we simply kept walking in opposite directions.

Evening after evening I watched from an unobtrusive lookout and sooner or later the Lieutenant would come strolling down the dark path. We would hurridly encircle the clubhouse, and follow the lane past the little chapel, past the laundry, through a little gate which opened into an abandoned tennis court. Here we had no reason to run into the wrong people.

Our rendezvous was beautifully scenic, surrounded by clumps of bamboo, with palm trees silhouetted against the evening sky, and sometimes a misty oriental moon adding an exotic touch which was unexplainably peculiar to the land of India. Jackals often came close and howled their weird songs; giant bats like great hawks winged silently overhead; and there was always the remote chance of meeting a leopard or a tiger.

Large U.S. Air Force planes at intervals roared overhead, in their missions to and from China which involved flying over the "Hump" --- the soldier's name for the Himalayan ranges. Sometimes these planes turned on their landing lights as they flew overhead, as if they were searching us out.

VIII. THE NATIVES ARE NO DIFFERENT

Some dhobies(Hindu laundrymen caste) worked near by and soon found out about our secret escapades, since our hiding place was not far from the laundry. Yet none of them ever betrayed us. They used to tease me each evening when I got my helmet of water from their water tank and heated it on their charcoal fire so I could shave before going out. As we sat around waiting for the water to boil they would ask about the "Lt. Memsab," and I would reply that that the "Memsab" was "tique kai," and then I would put my finger to my lips to impress them with the importance of keeping quiet. They would laugh uproariously and signal their understanding, and I would silently hope for the best.

Of course the Lieutenant and I kept up our professional duties as usual. I remember one delightful occasion when we were asked to visit the Mission Hospital near by, to play and sing for the

native patients there. We had no trouble getting a weapons carrier and as I was waiting for the "Memsab Lt." to appear near the path which led to the chow lane, the corporal who took care of the mail came by and jokingly remarked about our going out on a date, and we jokingly said "yes we were." I couldn't help being reminded of Edgar Allen Poe's story about the purloined letter in which a valuable letter was perfectly hidden by being stuck in plain sight on a wall. Because our activities were so ridiculously open they appeared to be perfectly hidden.

~~On the way to the hospital we had fun piling beer bottles on the front porch of a dignified Baptist missionary.~~

IX. NEW YEAR, NEW WORLD

On New Year's Eve, 1944, the Lieutenant was dressed in an evening gown, which the nurses often did for special occasions, instead of the usual army slacks. Here friends helped her get ready, but she wouldn't tell them what was the big occasion. She reported to Headquarters, signed out, and disappeared..

A few minutes later, by pre-arrangement we met at the chapel. After being used to drab army apparel in a jungle setting, this evening gown business was a pleasant shock.

That night, in the chapel, we got involved in some very serious discussions, even in the face of a future impossible to unravel or predict, which is par for the course when one is in the army overseas.

The next thing we knew we were actually contemplating the fantastic possibility of getting married in Cinnamara, Assam. After all, look at the miraculous series of events we had already gone through without a set-back.

Just to review: we had gone through an unimaginable series of extraordinary coincidences. The Lieutenant's orders had not come through; new nurses came in who had no way of knowing what we were up to; I was living with the sergeant in charge of the laundry which was separate from the regular outfit, and thus I could come and go without being discovered; our common professional activities allowed us to be together a great deal; the Lieutenant was not on regular duty because of an "emetine" allergy, and so on.

But there was also one gigantic obstacle to be overcome: General Stillwell had issued a clear-cut order that absolutely no military personnel shall be married in the China-Burma-India Theater.

After a week or two of indecision, I visited a fine American Baptist missionary friend, Dr. C. W. Cook, and outlined for him our wild ideas. To my surprise he seemed neither shocked nor disturbed, and confessed that he had been thinking along the same lines, never suspecting that we also had ideas. His reaction gave us a much needed morale boost.

Nevertheless, Dr. Cook could not specifically help us because General Stillwell had gotten the missionaries to promise not to preside over any weddings involving American soldiers. He did assure us, however, that he would act as an unofficial technical advisor if we proceeded with this venture.

Dr. Cook's first helpful advice was to suggest that we contact Padre William C. D. Campbell, plantation chaplain for the Cinnamara area. Since he was in no way obligated to the U. S. Army, but at the same time an official representative of the British Empire and also the Church of Scotland, he could really offer substantial help.

But the Padre, bless his soul, chose this time to take a trip to Calcutta, and would be gone a week. So there was nothing to do but wait. We got downright theological at this point and concluded if this venture were predestined to succeed it would succeed, and if not, this turn of events might be the beginning of the end.

After an interminable length of time (one week) the illusive Rev. William Campbell put in his appearance on the local scene. On a Sunday morning, immediately after church we cornered him and outlined our grand enterprise.

I remember he fiddled with his pipe for a while, and finally offered two alternatives: either we could have banns proclaimed (a requirement of the Church of Scotland) for three Sundays straight in his Church (the chapel previously referred to), or we could confer with the District Commissioner of the town of Jorhat and persuade him to give us some kind of governmental approval. The proclaiming of "banns" was absolutely out of the question with the U. S. Army within calling distance of the church. On the other hand Mr. Campbell said the district commissioner was a temperamental official and nothing much could be expected of him. Yet he was our only hope. So we went to the district commissioner, or more accurately, Padre Campbell and Dr. Cook went, while we stayed in the background nearby.

After our arrival at the district commissioner's home, the two preachers went into a huddle with the British Empire as they sat at a table on the commissioner's front lawn. We stayed in the automobile and were entertained by the commissioner's wife who was obviously curious about what was going on.

We finally told the commissioner's wife about our mission, and she started making trips back and forth between us and the men at the table, keeping us informed about progress being made. After a while the district commissioner asked a messenger boy to bring him a ponderous looking law book. This was followed by more waiting, and more discussions over more books.

Just as we were ready to give up hope, the commissioner relaxed his pompous demeanor, got up from his table and called us over. He announced that a solution had been worked out, and please would we sign on the dotted line. We did. To this day I think the wife had something to do with this outcome, and as far as we were concerned it was one time that it seemed appropriate for a wife to meddle in her husband's affairs.

X. WEDDINGS ARE COMPLICATED, EVEN IN ASSAM

In making plans for a wedding, one sooner or later is confronted with the matter of engagement rings, wedding rings, and things of that sort. To make matters worse, the Lieutenant insisted on a double ring ceremony. But where to get wedding rings was no little problem in this far-away jungle-patched rice-paddied oriental land. Dr. Cook, the missionary came to the rescue by suggesting that I go to a tiny shop in Jorhat, a place run by native artisans skilled in metal craft. They were friends of Dr. Cook and he vouched for their dependability.

At the earliest opportunity, after borrowing money from the Lieutenant to get the rings, I rushed to the little shop and told the men what we wanted. They promised to hammer out some rings in double quick time.

The Lieutenant suggested inscribing the rings with the phrase "And the greatest of these is love," coming from the last verse in the 13th chapter of I Corinthians. From Dr. Cook's Assamese Bible we copied the exact translation which in Assamese read "Premi Srestra." In the Assamese script this inscription turned out to be unusually unique and artistic.

So much for the wedding rings, but I still had to do with the engagement ring problem. I thought of a beautiful star ruby which Dr. Cook some months before had bought for an American soldier. But from Dr. Cook I learned that the stone had been shipped to America. But now came the news that it had been returned by the soldier's wife back home because she said it was too extravagant for her husband's pocketbook. This extravagance issue was no problem for me since I simply borrowed some more money from the Lieutenant and bought the stone. Our same artisans hammered out another beautiful ring with its star ruby setting. And so the ring problems were taken care of.

XI. THE WEDDING DAY RUNS TRUE TO FORM: HECTIC

Everyday is a beautiful day during the winter season in Assam, and our wedding day was no exception. In fact it was so beautiful that the chief of my department decided it was a perfect time for me to supervise housecleaning at the officers' barracks. Incidentally our wedding was to take place a few miles away in a Baptist Assamese chapel, but all under the guise of attending an afternoon tea party. But how could one ever convince a superior officer that he should be excused from an important assignment in order to go to a tea party?

There was no common sense solution to this problem which had to be dealt with immediately. So I did the impossible by marching straight into the officer's station and telling the whole story. He was speechless for a few moments, and then upon recovery not only gave me the day off, but also a week's furlough, along with an assurance that the matter would be kept confidential.

At 3:30 p.m. I motored to the nurses' headquarters, and picked up four nurses to attend the tea, and the Lieutenant was one of them. Three enlisted men also joined us. We were given a scare when they said some of the GIs were talking about some oriental wedding to take place in town that afternoon.

As far as I can remember the ceremony began on time. Sgt. Schottstaedt a University of Michigan music professor played the wedding march. Two special songs were sung, one by an Assamese lady, and the other by a Naga Headhunter named Panger. Dr. Cook the missionary made a few observations based on I Corinthians, chapter 13. Then Padre Campbell performed the ceremony using the Church of Scotland form. The Assamese pastor, highly respected in the town of Jorhat, pronounced the benediction. The little chapel was bounded on every side by great banks of flaming red poinsettias.

A gathering of folk had now congregated at Dr. Cook's bungalow for the celebrated "tea" and we joined them on the front lawn. As we went inside we were amazed to see a veritable banquet layed out by Dr. Cook with beautiful decorations and a chocolate wedding cake baked by Dr. Cook himself.

And now we were married, by the Church of Scotland at that, and not all the king's horses nor all the king's men could undo it, nor for that matter, all the stars on General Stillwell's epaulette.

XII. ARMY OR NOT, A CORPORAL LIVES IN STYLE

This clandestine achievement of a corporal marrying a lieutenant under the very nose of the U. S. Army was actually eclipsed by a corporal providing a home for his new wife.

What we did was to broaden the boundaries of our secret by confiding in a certain Mr. Tunstall who owned a mansion across the road from our army camp. Mr. Tunstall was one of those British men of leisure who like to smoke his pipe and talk about tiger hunting expeditions in Puna.

Mr. Stunstall, being a sportsman, was quite intrigued with our hide-and-seek game with the U. S. Army. And what really helped us was that he seemed to have a secret prejudice against the American army, which in turn made him an ardent supporter of our cause.

Anyway, he made available to us a small annex to his mansion which previously had been occupied by a young Indian boy whom he had reared. The boy had gone into the Indian Army, and the little apartment was open--- two rooms and a bath. It was close to our camp and yet secluded.

By night I smuggled in supplies, a chore which required perfect timing since I had to travel part of the main roadway leading to the Army Camp. Actually on one of my trips I was surprised with lights from vehicles coming from behind and in front. I dived into the ditch by the side of the road and breathlessly watched the commanding officer drive past in his jeep.

And so we set up housekeeping in our new apartment which we named "Honeymoon Annex." At exactly 7 a.m. each morning, when the nurses were changing shifts, Lt. Romein got back to the nurses quarters, and Corporal Romein got back to the tent next to the laundry, and nobody was the wiser.

For three weeks we carried out this dual existence, retreating to our quiet and secluded haven each evening, and returning to our duties undetected each morning. Usually about mid-morning the Lieutenant would stop and look at the map displays I was working on, and we often discussed current events. I did my best to explain to her how the war was going.

But the commanding officer at this time also developed the habit of checking out my maps and listening to the latest bulletins on radio, and so occasionally I found myself explaining the course of the war to both the lieutenant and the colonel. One day I remember he spotted the star ruby on the lieutenant's engagement ring finger (she wore the wedding ring on a chain around her neck). He asked some questions about it which the Lieutenant parried very neatly while I feverishly worked on my maps ~~at~~ the bulletin board.

XIII. A LEAVE OF ABSENCE WITH COMPLICATIONS

On Sunday evenings I had been in the habit of driving a weapons-carrier to a nearby mission church to transport army personnel who wished to attend services. The Lieutenant usually rode in the front seat with me, which now was really quite exciting as we transported our brood of privates, sergeants, nurses, and majors, and the like.

These little trips gave us an idea for a new adventure. The Lieutenant had two weeks leave-of-absence coming to her, and she decided now was a good time to use up her vacation time. She told the colonel she would like to spend some of her time off at the near-by mission hospital. The colonel couldn't quite see spending precious vacation time at another hospital. Why not Calcutta, or Darjeeling in the Himalayas, or some other glamorous resort spot? The Lieutenant said she had no desire to travel, but simply wanted a change of scenery.

The plan seemed to be going well. The Lieutenant would not be more than three miles away, and I could come and go without creating suspicions. If a weapons carrier was not available I could always hitchhike.

At the identical time the Lieutenant got her leave, however, an unexpected turn of events caused a real problem. An order came

through that no soldier was to be on the public highways except for official business. The whole area of Jorhat (and the hospital) was declared out of bounds for the military personnel. There I was--- my wife at the Mission hospital, and I was grounded. I tried to slip through the first day but by mistake flagged a military policeman, for which I got a stern lecture and was told to stay off the road henceforth. But I had to get through to the hospital somehow. The Lieutenant would be worried if I did not show up, and using the company telephone was out of the question. I finally contacted a sergeant who was going to Jorhat on official business and begged a ride. The next morning I had to get back for work and took to back roads, jungle and fields, and successfully ran the blockade. Ironically, later in the day I walked across the main highway to have an Indian tailor fix my uniform and ran smack into two military policemen. I had to threaten to get the tailor to verify my story before they let me go. I was discovering it's not all that pleasant to be a fugitive before the law, and for sure I was getting very allergic to MPs.

The next evening at dusk I was hovering near the main gate of our camp not knowing what to do next, and completely empty of any imaginative solutions to my problem. Meanwhile the evening got darker and darker.

At this point the transportation sergeant rode by, and as he passed yelled at me to come by and see him at his headquarters only a few hundred feet away. When I approached him he immediately asked me what was the trouble. How he knew I had troubles I'll never know. I simply told him I desperately needed transportation to the mission hospital. Without another word he walked over to one of his vehicles, made some minor adjustments, wrote an official pass for me, and told me the vehicle was mine for the evening. The only plausible explanation for this unexpected favor from a hard boiled transportation sergeant was that a few minutes previous, I had been praying very hard, and this was an answer to prayer.

As a response to this act of mercy I asked the Sergeant if he knew that Lt. Harris was at the mission hospital. "Of course," he replied, "I furnished the transportation for getting her down there." "Does that give you any idea why I'm going to the hospital," I asked. He ~~then~~ informed me he wasn't blind. But even with this insight into the situation, he was visibly shaken when I told him Lt. Harris was my wife.

The sergeant's response was magnificent. He sat down and made full arrangements for me to have the weapons carrier every evening after dark for the next two weeks. He gave me the necessary credentials to pass the inspection of MPs, and told me to run along and have a good time. Meanwhile for the next two weeks I heard about officers fuming because of lack of transportation at night.

XIV. GIVING IT THE OLD COLLEGE TRY

After we had been married for three or four weeks, I was telling the Lieutenant one day how nice it would have been if we had met in college, and I could have given her some of the medals I had won in track and field meets, and how much fun it would have been during

the basketball season for her to have been in the stands.

A few days after this conversation by virtue of a remarkable coincidence, an officer called and asked if I would care to participate in the Little Olympics, a track and field meet to be held in Assam Valley between British, South Africans, Indians, and Americans. It did not make good sense to participate since I was not in training, but here was a chance to resurrect a bit of the old college spirit, especially with the Lieutenant in the stands.

I had one week to practice. I was terribly anxious to look impressive. I hadn't pole vaulted for nine years and was a bit apprehensive about the outcome.

There was an overflow crowd at the field. I knew the Lieutenant was out there somewhere. In due time the pole vault competition was announced. Several competitors dropped out at nine feet. One American remained, but he dropped out at ten feet. By now I was really feeling good, and kept on jumping, 10'6", then 11 feet, and finally 11'7" which was not too bad without training nor practice, and with a bamboo pole cut out of the jungle. The Lieutenant stopped by to congratulate me. Up in the stands I spotted the District Commissioner and his wife who looked on knowingly. By now I had come to realize what a remarkable people the British really are.

XV. IF GOD BE FOR US WHO CAN BE AGAINST US

For five weeks now we had lived from day to day, always aware that separation might be just around the corner, either because of being discovered or for the Lieutenant's orders coming through.

And then it happened. The orders came through. But they were not the Lieutenant's orders but my orders. For a soldier overseas, the supreme moment has to do with orders coming through to return to the good old USA. But how could I leave under these circumstances?

I met the Lieutenant at the little chapel for the last time. We said goodbye and I headed for the airport in Jorhat where I would begin an 18,000 mile journey to America by air.

Shortly after I left, the Lieutenant told the commanding officer our secret. The colonel, gruff as he was, and whom we feared most, took it upon himself to expedite her orders. We were now hoping that orders would come through quickly so that we could meet in America, for my itinerary called for a year's return to India after completing my furlough in America.

Actually it took almost a month for the Lieutenant's orders to come through which dashed our plans since her arrival in America pretty much coincided with my departure for India. What the army did next is hard to explain, but believe it or not, upon my request they gave me an additional two weeks leave for our second honeymoon, courtesy of the U. S. Army, no strings attached.

And then the greatest surprise of all: Japan surrendered during my additional two-week leave of absence. When I reported for duty, it was decided that in light of Japan's surrender there would be no point in having to carry out my assignment in India.

In a few months the war was over, and we were both returned to civilian life. And so ends a gentle tale with a good ending, and a good word for the army, and a testimony that even in wartime a little freedom can go a long way.